

MILAN CATHEDRAL- Treasure hunt

1. **The Cathedral in numbers:** guess what the following numbers refer to: 11,700 m² - 1774 – 108.50 m - 164 - 5 - 3,400 - 4 m - 1813 - 158 m - 135 – around 37 km

- Madonnina Installation
- Completion of the facade, by Napoleon's will
- Surface covered
- Height of the Madonnina from the ground
- Distance from the horizon, from the top
- Height of the Madonnina statue
- External length
- Number of spires
- Number of statues (of which approximately 2,300 are external)
- Number of windows
- Doors in the facade

2. Where does the **marble** of the cathedral come from?

3. What **architectural style** are the top three windows? Romanic - Gothic - Renaissance

4. What is the **Madonnina** made of? How tall is it?

5. Where is the cathedral **sundial** (look on the floor for a brass line from north to south ...). Can you recognize the zodiac signs? What is the biggest one? Do you know why?

6. Find the **first stone** of the cathedral (to the left of Ariberto's sarcophagus ...). What's written on it?

7. Find the statue of St. Bartholomew (also called the "**Scourged**" statue) and describe it

This is surely one of the most impressive works of the whole cathedral. St. Bartholomew was a saint who healed the sick and the obsessed, and in his martyrdom he was slain alive and then beheaded. Originally the statue was outside the cathedral, in the square in front of it, but its sight was so horrible that the bishop had it moved away.

8. What do the **glasses** represent?

9. Whose saint is the **grave** kept in the **crypt**? What material is the urn made of?

10. What do the **statues** in the **apse** represent?

11. In the apse, can you also find the **holy nail of the cross**? (look up ...)

It is reported that the Holy Nail has been in Milan for a long time and has been found by St. Ambrogio. In a warm afternoon of the fourth century, Ambrogio, formerly bishop of Milan, was going around the city. Passing in front of a locksmith's shop, he was attracted by the din of the hammering. **Entering into the humble workshop of the craftsman, he saw him busy trying to bend a small piece of iron.** The hammer repeatedly hit the white-hot metal, causing a rain of sparks to illuminate the interior of the shop, but the shots did not deform the small object. Ambrogio kept watching the poor man's work for a while. The iron was positioned again and again in the brazier, warmed up until glowing and, returning to the anvil, beaten by the mallet with all his strength; nothing was changing, **the metal did not shape.** The blacksmith, sweating and swearing, threw the hammer on the ground. Ambrogio approached the man and asked for permission to examine the object: **it was a large twisted nail, a bit more than a span long.** Ambrose was pale. It was one of the four nails used to crucify Jesus. For years the traces of this sacred object had been lost, and now, without anyone being able to explain how, it reappeared in the shop of a humble blacksmith.

The nail had been lost by emperor Constantine, who had received it from his mother Elena. She had found all the four Crucifixion Nails in 326 in Jerusalem, the same year when she also found the remains of the Magi. **One of the nails had been thrown into the sea by Elena herself to appease a storm that had caught her boat as she was crossing the Adriatic.** The remaining three nails, who had got in Constantine's possession, had been placed in his helmet, in a bridle and in the bite of his horse, to avoid further misfortunes. **Inexplicably, two relics disappeared,** and in spite of exhausting research and incredible rewards, they had been never found, till the day when the nail adapted to the horse bite did not reappear in a Milan workshop.

Ambrogio immediately took the Nail to St. Tecla, the summer basilica, where it remained until the church was demolished to make room for the construction of the cathedral.

The first procession of the Holy Nail that can be remembered dates back to 1576 when, during the plague, St. Carlo carried the relic in procession from the cathedral to the church of St. Celso to implore the end of the epidemic.

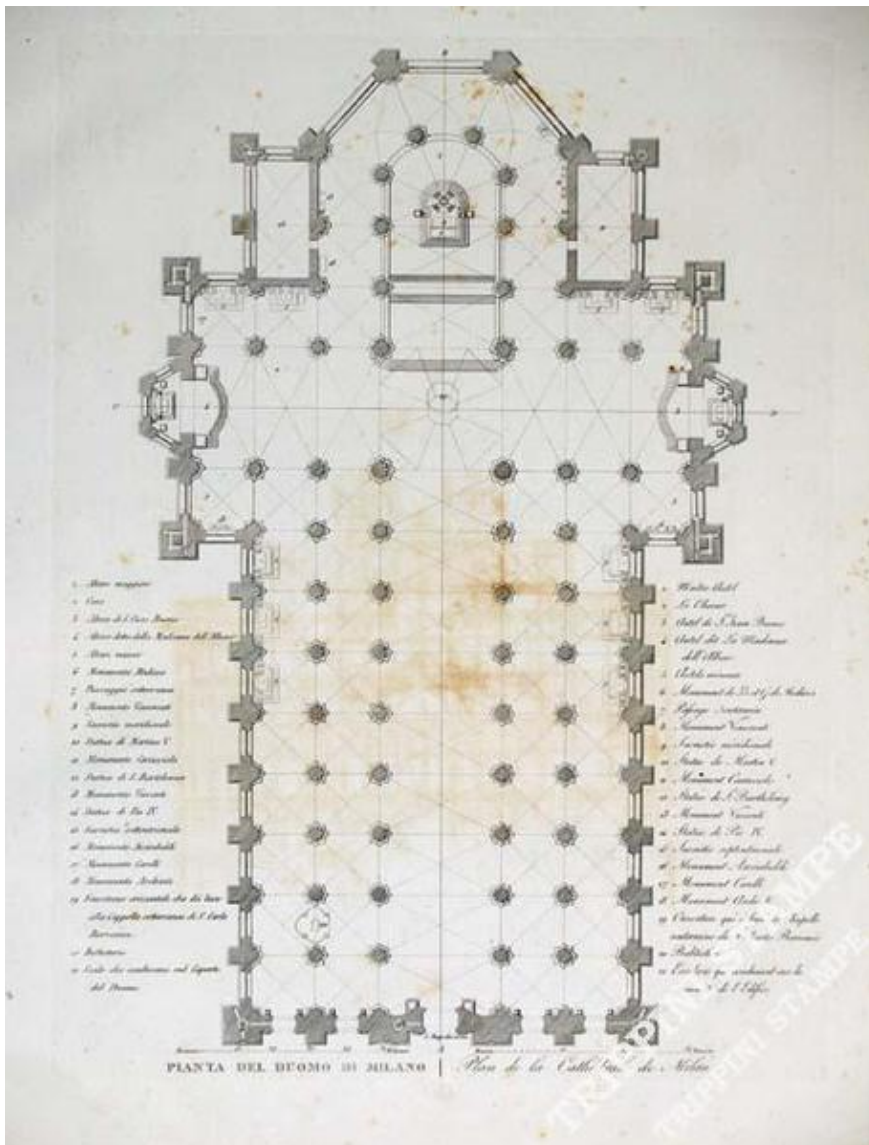
12. Where is the **NIVOLA**? The Nivola is a big object suspended and protected by a white cloth - a basket-shaped structure on which angels and clouds are painted. This is in fact a rudimentary elevator (now electrically powered, once

moved by a rope system) that every year (in September) allows the bishop of Milan to reach the vault of the apse where the reliquary is located. Inside, it houses one of the sacred nails of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Every year, on **13 September**, five canons and the archbishop of Milan rise up to 45 meters high, thanks to a complex system of electric winches which, in the vault of the cathedral apse, allows to pick up a case that contains one of the Nails of the Crucifixion and a fragment of the Cross. The strange medium, called Nivola, seems to have been designed by Leonardo (originally it was run by some twenty men on the roof of the cathedral) to allow the bishop to reach the Holy relic and carry it into a procession inside the cathedral.

In its present form, the level, as well as the artistic cross that hosts the Holy Nail, **dates back to the time of Cardinal Federico Borromeo**: consisting of a large metal sheet basket, wrapped in a canvas lining and adorned with paintings representing angels and cherubs wrapped in vaporous clouds, was painted by Landriani in 1612, and, since then, has been repeatedly restored. Around three meters long and a little less wide, **the bizarre «elevator» weighs about eight quintals**. Yet, the astonished devotee has always the impression of seeing a small incense volute rising.

Use the Cathedral map to mark what you have seen and write the answers to questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.



Milan Cathedral is the symbol of Milan and is located on the square in the center of the city. It is one of the most famous and complex Gothic buildings in the world. In size it is the second highest church in the world (after the cathedral of Beauvais in France) and the third largest (after St. Peter's in the Vatican and the cathedral of Seville). Where the cathedral is located now, first stood the ancient cathedral of Santa Maria Maggiore. The cathedral was built according to the wish of Archbishop Antonio from Saluzzo and the Lord of Milan Gian Galeazzo Visconti. In 1418 the main altar was consecrated by Pope Martino V and in 1572 St. Carlo Borromeo consecrated the church even if the building had not been completed yet. In the eighteenth century they built the largest spire on which the golden Madonnina was raised, while the facade was completed in 1813 on the occasion of the crowning of Napoleon, who here wanted to be crowned king of Italy. Throughout the nineteenth century spires and all the architectural decorations were completed. In 1943, after the damage suffered during the Second World War, the cathedral was largely restored and the wooden doors were replaced with others, made of bronze. The cathedral's maintenance is entrusted to the Esteemed Duomo Factory, whose interventions are continuous.

Keys

1. **The Cathedral in numbers:** guess what the following numbers refer to: 11,700 m² - 1774 – 108.50 m - 164 - 5 - 3,400 - 4 m - 1813 - 158 m - 135 – around 37 km

- Madonnina Installation 1774
- Completion of the facade, by Napoleon's will 1813
- Surface covered 11,700 m²
- Height of the Madonnina from the ground 108.50 m
- Distance from the horizon, from the top around 37 Km
- Height of the Madonnina statue 4 m
- External length 158 m
- Number of spires 135
- Number of statues about 3,400 (of which approximately 2,300 are external)
- Number of windows 164
- Doors in the facade 5

Other numbers:

1386: the cathedral year of birth

93 meters: its width.

108 meters: its height.

52: the pillars dividing the aisles

40: the columns of each spire with a hundred flowers and with about 8-10 statues

4 meters: the height of the Madonnina

3,400: the Madonnina gold leaves

2. Where does the **marble** of the cathedral come from?

The marble of Candoglia is a white/pink or gray marble, extracted in the quarries of Candoglia, in the municipality of Mergozzo, in the province of Verbano Cusio Ossola, in the valley of Ossola.

3. What **architectural style** are the top three windows? Romanic - Gothic - Renaissance Gothic.

4. What is the **Madonnina** made of? How tall is it?

Copper and gold. 4.15m.

5. Where is the cathedral **sundial** (look on the floor for a brass line from north to south ...). Can you recognize the zodiac signs? What is the biggest one? Do you know why?

The Sundial

It was built by Brera astronomers in 1780. The sunlight that penetrates the Oculus in the vault of the first right nave span hits the brass line placed on the cathedral floor during the summer solstice (June 21) while it reaches the sundial that rises perpendicularly on the opposite wall during the winter solstice (December 21st).

The sundial, in the past, was also called the 'Linea della Rosa' (Line of the rose) and it was meant to be an imaginary line drawn from the north pole to the south pole. In ancient times, the world's longitude was passing through Paris (it can still be found in the Saint-Sulpice church), and since 1884 the fundamental meridian was agreed in Greenwich (England) during the International Meridian Meridian Conference.

Surely curious is the fact that the meridians of Milan have also been shown the zodiac signs. The biggest one, the one that falls during the winter solstice, is Capricorn. Strongly visible on the wall of the left nave, it has been the protagonist of many theories and many hypotheses. Some associate the capricorn of the cathedral with the desire to combine paganism with Christianity: the winter solstice, celebrated in pagan rituals, falls a few days after the birth of Christ, celebrated by Christian rites. In addition, capricorn is half a goat (symbol of 'fire') and half a fish (symbol of water). The fire symbol is also represented as a triangle as well as that of the water as an inverted triangle. United together (like in the two animals that make up Capricorn), they create a six-pointed star, David's star or Solomon's seal. In addition to being used in esotericism, the tips of the star would represent the planets with the center in the sun and therefore Christ.

Other theories would associate the capricorn represented by the "billygoat" to Satan or to Baphomet, a horned idol that is thought to be used in the initiation rites of the Templars. The presence of a Templar element may also be due to the fact that the immense cathedrals of Europe, for the inaccessible cost of realization, were in fact largely subsidized by the treasures of the Templars.

6. Find the **first stone** of the cathedral (to the left of Ariberto's sarcophagus ...). What's written on it?

EL PRINCIPIO
DIL DOMO DI
MILANO FU
NEL ANNO
1386

The beginning of Milan
cathedral was in the year
1386



7. Find the statue of St. Bartholomew (also called the "**Scourged**" statue) and describe it.



The statue is at the bottom of the right nave, in the transept, opposite the Medici Mausoleum. - It is a statue representing a man to whom all skin has been removed. You see all the muscles and veins and the skin is like a mantle that the saint takes on his shoulders.

8. What do the **glasses** represent?

Lives of Saints and passages from the Scriptures.

9. Whose saint is the **grave** kept in the **crypt**? What material is the urn made of?

St. Carlo Borromeo (1610). It is made of crystal and silver.

10. What do the **statues** in the **apse** represent?

Angels.

11. In the apse, can you also find **the holy nail of the cross**? (look up ...)

The relic of the Holy Nail of the Cross is at the top of the vault (The nail was discovered by St. Ambrogio in a handicraft shop. In fact, seeing a blacksmith struggling on the red-hot iron without being able to bend it in any way, he realized that it could only be a prodigious fact and that piece of metal was definitely one of the four nails of the cross of Jesus.)

12. Where is the **NIVOLA**?

It is located near the first span of the right aisle.

The Nivola is a great object suspended and protected by a white cloth - a basket-shaped structure on which angels and clouds are painted. This is in fact a rudimentary elevator (now electrically powered, once moved by a rope system) that allows every year (in September) the bishop of Milan to reach the vault of the apse where the reliquary is located.

Inside, it houses one of the holy nails of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

(see story above)

The Holy Nail is exhibited every year to the devotee on the occasion of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross with the Nivola Ceremony.

This particular ceremony was celebrated for the first time in 1576, when Milan was hit by the plague and Archbishop Carlo Borromeo decided to take the holy nail to procession in order to ask for the end of the disease.

To reach the 45 meters where the shrine was, they designed a structure that can carry up to 4 people: the Archbishop and 3 deacons.

Initially, the structure was nothing more than a wooden platform supported by 4 maneuvered tie rods lifting it up. Only in 1600 it was decorated and painted as we see it today, and only in 1970, when the 4 tiboric pylons were restored, the manual mechanism was replaced by 4 electric motors.

The ceremony was always celebrated on 3rd May (the day when the church remembers the discovery of the Cross by Elena) until 1805 when Napoleon, having to be crowned king of Italy in the cathedral, decided to move it in September. Since then, the celebration takes place on Saturday, 14th September, when the nail is taken out, to be put back in the case on the next Monday after the evening mass, thus remaining exposed to the devotees for 3 days.

In its present form the Nivola is made up of a large sheet metal basket, wrapped in a canvas lining and decorated with paintings representing angels and cherubs wrapped in vaporous clouds - was painted by Landriani in 1612 and, since then, has been restored several times. Around three meters long and a little less wide, the bizarre «elevator» weighs about eight quintals. Yet, the astonished devotee has always the impression of seeing a small incense volute rising.

The Nivola is three meters high and two and a half wide, it weighs eight quintals and can carry 400 kg. When the Archbishop ascends, he opens the niche, retrieves the crystal case that contains the Holy Nail and inserts it into a golden cross exposing it to the devotees (the cross should be visible in the fifth altar of the left nave). In the days of the ceremony of the Nivola, 15 paintings (originally 22 of which 7 are dispersed) are referred to as "the recovery cycle". They are 3.20 x 2.70 meters paintings dating back to the 18th century that had been paid by the corporations in Milan and which represent the recovery of the Holy Nail.

The Nivola and the Holy Nail



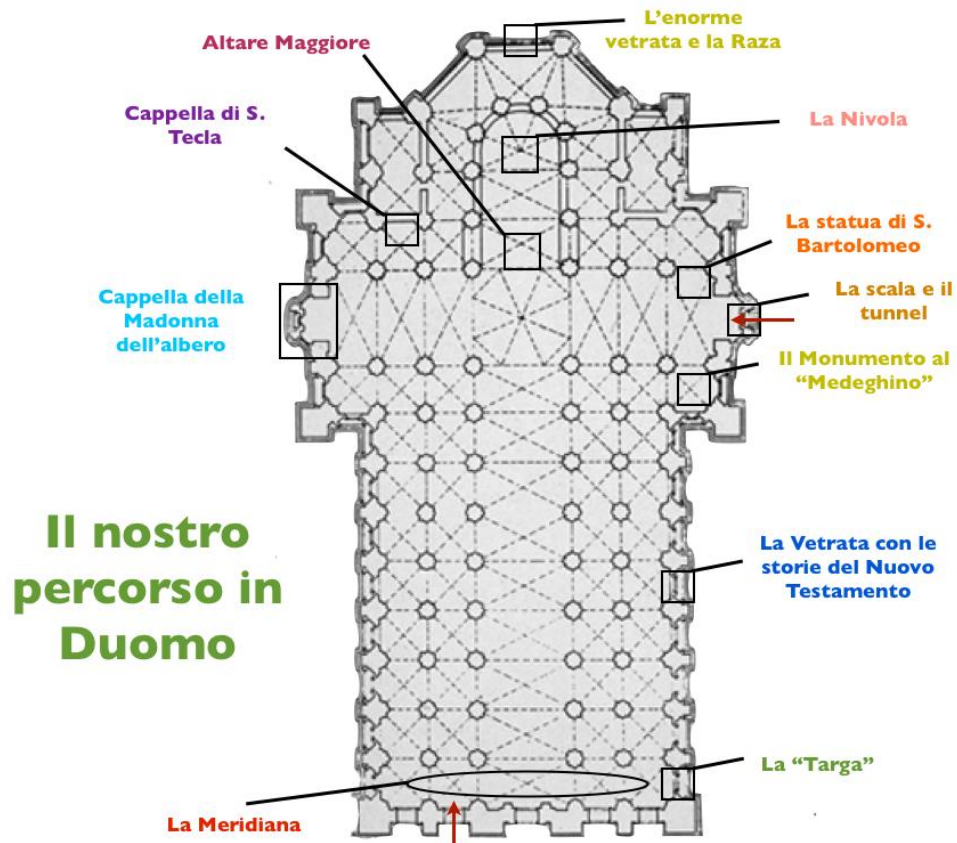
Also read

<http://www.lass.it/Milano/pages.aspx?m=23>



... A strange hole

Next to the Nivola you can see a hole in the vault from which the sunlight penetrates. It is the Oculus of the sundial (see also "The sundial", nr.13)



Something more:



The funeral monument to Gian Giacomo Medici was commissioned by Pope Pius IV in honor of his brother Gian Giacomo Medici, chieftain and Marquis of Marignano, nicknamed "Medeghino", and realized by the sculptor Leone Leoni on Michelangelo Buonarroti's design. The monument, made of precious marble, contains in its center the bronze statue of Medeghino in military clothes between two decorated marble columns. All the six columns, of Oriental decorated marbles, were sent from Rome directly by the Pope: among the left columns there is a statue of the Militia, while on the right a statue of Peace, both overlaid by festoons and bas-reliefs of the Adda and Ticino. In the upper order of the monument there are two statues of Fame and Providence, beside two candlesticks and two plates.

Notice the **Trivulzio candelabra**: it consists of two parts; a foot, a tangle of vines, plants, fantastic animals, attributed to Nicolas de Verdun (thirteenth century) and a willow seven-armed stem, with volutes and embroideries of the mid 1500's.

It is a bronze jewelry work of five meters high for four in width, considered a masterpiece of Gothic sculpture.

It is located in the chapel of the Madonna of the tree.



The Cathedral is a symbol of the city. Founded in 1386 under Gian Galeazzo Visconti, and dedicated to S. Maria Nascente, it was begun by Simone da Orsenigo, followed by Giovannino de' Grassi, Marco da Carona and Filippino degli Organi. As the centuries went by, the main architects of the time worked on it, among whom we can mention Giovanni and Guiniforte Solari, and in the second half of the 20th century Giovanni Antonio Amadeo, Vincenzo Seregni and Pellegrino Tibaldi in the 15th century, Lello Buzzi and Francesco Maria Richini in the sixteenth century. Between 1765 and 1769 Francesco Croce realized the crowning of the lantern with the main spire, on which in 1774 the golden statue of the Madonnina was raised. In 1812 the spikes were completed.

The façade is also marked by the complexity of the building process; the five portals and the upper windows, of Pellegrino Tibaldi, date back to 1600s; the central counter is of 1790; the three upper gothic windows of Carlo Amati and the bronze doors of Luciano Minguzzi are from the early 1800s.

The interior has five aisles where the 52 pillars and the pulpit stand; altars, mausoleums and chapels, including the funeral monument of Gian Giacomo Medici (Leone Leoni, 1560-1563); in the crypt below, a circular space that gives access to the chapel of St. Carlo, designed by Francesco Maria Richini in 1606, is the crystal urn that holds the remains of St. Carlo Borromeo. In the adjacent rooms are precious works of goldsmiths, the oldest dated back to the 4th-5th century.

Entering the Cathedral you are hit by grandeur, austerity, and "collected beauty". The plant is on a Latin cross, the space of the long arm is articulated in five aisles, that of the transept in three, the altar is placed in a slightly elevated area, introduced by pillars, whose capitals end in eight niches populated by statues of martyrs, and statues of angels in the apse. The central nave is higher than the side walls, and shows some nineteenth-century festoon decorations; the vaults are severely sharp (typical of the Gothic), as typical are the stained glass windows with light and color games, which represent the lives of saints and passages from scriptures. Along the side aisles, we can see sarcophagi of Milanese bishops such as Ariberto d'Intimiano, surmounted by a cross, or of important figures such as the benefactor Marco Carelli, who donated to the cathedral more than 35,000 golden ducats at the end of the 14th century.

The cathedral was also the longest church in Europe and of the world then known (with its 158 meters, in fact, it was only overtaken by St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, which was built in the mid-sixteenth century) and had to look very huge in a Milan that was just beyond the Navigli circle and where the houses reached a maximum of three or four floors. During this period, the management of the Factory passed to the Solari architects' family and at this time the lantern was built.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the front of the cathedral was begun by Pellegrino Tibaldi, favored by Cardinal Carlo Borromeo, but in the following century Richini and Buzzi redesigned it on baroque modules. In 1769 the main spire was erected with the Madonnina, molded in copper and then gilded by Giuseppe Perego in 1723.

The facade of the cathedral, for which a lot of projects were taken into consideration, was finished by Napoleon's will: in 1813, in fact, he had to be crowned King of Italy in the symbol church of Milan. Later, the cathedral was completed with several additions and at the beginning of the twentieth century Ludovico Pogliaghi modeled the intricate high-relief of the central door; the other three bronze doors were installed between 1948 and 1950. The last one in January 1965.